

Message Text

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO AMEMBASSY CAIRO IMMEDIATE
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S E C R E T STATE 079728

NODIS

FOL TEL SENT ACTION SECSTATE FROM BEIRUT DTD 01 APR 1976 QUOTE

S E C R E T BEIRUT 2867

NODIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT,PFOR, LE,PINS
SUBJ: TALK WITH CHRISTIAN LEADERS

SUMMARY: MET WITH CHRISTIAN LEADERS TODAY. BASED ON
WHAT WE SAW, I AM RELATIVELY RELAXED ON THEIR PROSPECTS
FOR HOLDING OUT. FRANGIE WORRIED ABOUT NEED FOR SYRIAN
OR OTHER TROOPS TO GUARANTEE CEASEFIRE, BUT APPEARS
PREPARED TO RESIGN IN CONTEXT OF CONSTITUTIONAL SOLUTION
WHICH WOULD FOLLOW. END SUMMARY

1. GOT METICULOUS PRESENTATION OF CHRISTIAN POSITION FROM
PRESIDENT FRANGIE TODAY, WHO WAS JOINED HALF-WAY THROUGH
BY CHAMOUN AND GEMAYEL IN MEETING WHICH LASTED ALMOST THREE
HOURS. ALL EMPHASIZED PROBLEM WAS NOT LEBANESE BUT HAD
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BEGUN WITH PALESTINIANS. GENERAL THEME OF FOREIGNERS

AND LEFTISTS IDEOLOGICALLY INSPIRED BY SOVIETS AND BANK-ROLLED BY LIBYANS, IRAQIS, ETC., HIGHLIGHTED PRESENTATION. FRANGIE WAS THE MOST INFORMATIVE AND SPECIFIC. CHAMOUN CONCENTRATED ON ALARMIST DESCRIPTION AIMED AT PRODUCING SOME KIND OF U.S. ACTION. GEMAYEL WAS THE MOST EMOTIONAL AND REPETITIOUS, EMPHASIZING LEBANESE PATRIOTISM. ALL DESCRIBED WILL TO FIGHT TO THE END IN VERY DESPERATE TERMS, BUT WERE SHORT ON FACTS TO SUPPORT DESPARATE CONCLUSIONS.

2. WHEN I ASKED POINT-BLANK HOW LONG CHRISTIANS COULD HOLD OUT, FRANGIE SAID WITH OUTSIDE HELP INDEFINITELY. WITHOUT SUCH OUTSIDE HELP, 10 TO 20 DAYS. CHAMOUN PRODUCED CHURCHILLIAN NEAR-QUOTE: "GIVE US THE TOOLS AND WE WILL DO THE JOB." FRANGIE REPEATEDLY EMPHASIZED THAT IF NEED BE, MARONITES COULD HOLD OUT IN THE MOUNTAINS INDEFINITELY, AS THEY HAD DONE FOR HUNDREDS OF YEARS IN THE PAST. BY SAME TOKEN,NUMBER OF SENIOR CHRISTIAN OFFICERS WITH WHOM WE TALKED ON OUR WAY TO THE MEETING IN JOUNIEH DISPLAYED NO ALARM OVER MILITARY SITUATION AND DID NOT MENTION SHORTAGES IN AMMUNITION, BEYOND NOTING THAT IT WAS USED MORE SPARINGLY BY THEM THEN BY PROFLIGATE OTHER SIDE WHICH SEEMED TO ENJOY UNLIMITED SUPPLIES.

3. FRANGIE DESCRIBED AIMS OF OTHER SIDE AS EITHER (A) MAKING LEBANON A MOSLEM COUNTRY (WHICH WAS TRADITIONAL AIM OF MOSLEMS) OR (B) CHANGE POLITICAL REGIME (WHICH WAS NEW AIM OF LEFTISTS SUPPORTED FROM OUTSIDE). ALL THREE DESCRIBED PRESENT OFFENSIVE AGAINST PRESIDENT AS AIMED AT INSTITUTION OF THE PRESIDENCE, WHICH LEFTISTS WISH TO DEMOLISH JUST AS LEFTISTS ARE INDISCRIMINATELY DEMOLISHING LEBANESE COMMERCE, INDUSTRY AND REAL ESTATE. FRANGIE IN PARTICULAR MADE MUCH OF WHAT HE DESCRIBED AS CONSTANT NEW LEFTIST DEMANDS AND EXPLAINED MARONITE INTRANSIGENCE (INCLUDING HIS WEASELING ON HIS OWN RESIGNATION) IN TERMS OF DANGER OF SLIPPERY SLOPE.

4.FRANGIE SAID ANY CEASEFIRE HAD BE GUARANTEED IF IT NOT TO FAIL AS HAD DOZENS OF EARLIER ONES. BY THIS HE
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MEANT FORCE AND LOTS OF IT. HE AND OTHERS MADE CLEAR THAT THEY DID NOT LIKE SADAT ARAB PLAN BUT SUPPORTED SYRIAN MILITARY INTERVENTION. THEY SAID SYRIANS HAD BEEN PREPARED TO INTERVENE IN FORCE BUT WERE PREVENTED BY U.S. DECLARATIONS OPPOSING ANY UNILATERAL INTERVENTION. I TOLD THEM IN NO UNCERTAIN TERMS THAT INTERVENTION IS NOT A LIGHT MATTER AND THAT THEIR ADVOCACY OF IT SHOULD BE RATIONALLY AND NOT JUST EMOTIONALLY THOUGHT THROUGH,

ESPECIALLY WITH REGARD TO REACTIONS IT MIGHT PROVOKE
THROUGHOUT THE MIDDLE EAST. I KNOW THE POINT GOT
THROUGH.

5. THE THREE OF THEM, INDIVIDUALLY AND AS A GROUP, SAE
LITTLE PROSPECT FOR SYRIANS TO PLAY CEASEFIRE POLICING
ROLE, USING ONLY THOSE SYRIAN-CONTROLLED TROOPS, SUCH AS PLA
AND SAIQA, WHICH ARE ALREADY IN COUNTRY. SAID THIS WOULD
ASSUME HIGH DEGREE OF PALESTINIAN MODERATION AND WILLING-
NESS TO ABIDE BY CAIRO ACCORDS (WHICH, INCIDENTALLY,
FRANGIE MADE AN ABSOLUTE CONDITION OF ANY PERMANENT CEASE-
FIRE). GEMAYEL WAS LESS CATEGORIC THAN OTHERS. HE
SUGGESTED IT MIGHT BE WORTH CONSIDERING IF U.S. BELIEVED
AFTER TALKING TO SYRIANS THAT THEY HAD ENOUGH FORCES IN
LEBANON.

6. IF CEASEFIRE, COUPLED WITH SOME GUARANTEE OF ENOUGH
FORCE TO MAKE IT STICK, WERE ACHIEVED, FRANGIE TOLD US HE
SAW NO PROBLEM FOLLOWING AGREED CONSTITUTIONAL SOLUTION.
THIS WOULD BE AMENDMENT OF ARTICLE 73 OF THE CONSTITUTION
BY THE PARLIAMENT AND ELECTION OF NEW PRESIDENT UNDER
CONDITION FREE OF PRESSURE, AFTER WHICH REMAINDER OF
HIS PERIOD OF OFFICE WAS TOO SHORT TO BE WORTHWHILE
AND HE WOULD TAKE A BADLY NEEDED REST. THIS STATEMENT
OF WILLINGNESS TO RESIGN WAS PERHAPS THE SINGLE MOST
SOLID PIECE OF INFORMATION WE GOT FROM FRANGIE. HE
SOUNDED CONVINCED ENOUGH, BUT I DID WONDER WHY HE DID NOT
REPEAT THIS STATEMENT IN FRONT OF CHAMOUN AND GEMAYEL.
IN THEIR PRESENCE, HE LIMITED HIMSELF TO ARGUING, AS
THEY WERE, THAT CALL FOR HIS RESIGNATION WAS A FALSE
ISSUE.

7. ALSO SAW MARONITE PATRIARCH. HE TOLD ME HE WOULD BE
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SEEING FRANGIE ET AL SOONEST AND WOULD MAKE POINT THAT
CONSTITUTIONAL AMENITIES CANNOT STAND IN WAY OF POLITICAL
REALITIES. HE IS A REFRESHING BREATH OF FRESH AIR IN
THIS FETID ATMOSPHERE WHERE SHORT TERM AIMS ARE TOO
EASILY CONFUSED WHICH LONG TERM DEVELOPMENTS.
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